

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 12, 2008

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter is in response to a letter that we received on February 5 from Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regarding the cancellation of the request for proposals (RFP) for the World Trade Center (WTC) Business Processing Center, the mechanism which would provide treatment to the sick heroes who came from all parts of the country to respond to the 9/11 attacks. The response from Dr. Gerberding fails to address our concerns about the potential impact of this action that is jeopardizing the health of thousands of WTC responders.

While we appreciate your commitment to maintain continuity of services, the fact remains that there is no well-established program outside of the New York metropolitan area to serve the health care needs of responders across the nation. And the track record of the federal government in trying to establish national programs to address 9/11 health is disappointing. The Government Accountability Office has repeatedly criticized the lack of consistent medical monitoring for federal employees following 9/11. As a result, we must once again reiterate the urgency of developing a reliable mechanism to ensure that our heroes get the care that they need and deserve.

Of particular concern to us is that fact that Dr. Gerberding's letter provides no schedule for reviewing the cancellation of the request and determining how to proceed with providing care to those who are sick. If your department does not take some action to develop a mechanism to pay for the medical treatment for WTC-related medical conditions in the next few weeks, there will not be time to announce and process a new RFP in time to keep the program running. Failure to fund treatment – even for a few weeks – is likely to deprive thousands of responders living outside of the New York City metropolitan area of badly needed medical care for the illnesses that they have developed as a result of their exposure to a cocktail of toxins while assisting our nation in its response to the 9/11 attacks.

Those who are now sick because of their exposure to the toxic substances released in this attack showed no hesitation when called to serve. Yet they are now faced with potential delays in care because of the inability of your department to agree on a request for proposals, five months after a pre-proposal conference was held in New York City. We ask that you provide us with a response to this letter within the next week that clearly lays out a schedule for developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for providing care to these workers.


Sincerely,


CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senator


HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
United States Senator


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress


JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress


EDOLPHUS TOWNS
Member of Congress


VITO FOSSELLA
Member of Congress